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De Witt, John

Intellectual life of Sam
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THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE OF SAMUEL MILLER

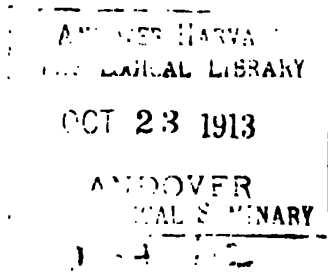
*The Opening Address of the Session of 1905-06
at Princeton Theological Seminary*



By PROF. JOHN DE WITT



Reprinted from the April (1906) Number of
The Princeton Theological Review



II.

THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE OF SAMUEL MILLER.*

SOME years since, when it fell to me to deliver the opening address of the session, I told the story of the preparation of Archibald Alexander, our first Professor, for his professorship. I had occasion at that time, when speaking of the founding of the Seminary, to mention the name of Samuel Miller who, with Ashbel Green and Archibald Alexander, was most active in the labors which brought the Seminary into being. I could only mention his name and characterize him in a sentence or two; but to these sentences I added the remark: "I hope to do later what the time allotted to this opening lecture will not permit me to do now; namely, so to set before you the life, character and work of this great founder and benefactor of the Seminary as will leave on you the impression I have received of his high intellectual life." I emphasized particularly his intellectual life because, in the impression which the present generation has received of him, his intellectual character is by no means so distinct as his spirituality, his goodness and his courtesy. We shall all agree that the noblest and the most desirable memory a man can "leave to the next age" is one of which high moral and religious traits are the dominating elements; even if they are so dominating as greatly to obscure, if not entirely to hide, those which are distinctively intellectual. Something like this has happened to Dr. Miller. His pupils were so strongly impressed and influenced by his spirituality, his kindness, his refinement and his urbanity, that in their reminiscences of him they have dwelt on these almost exclusively. So that we, who belong to a later generation and have not had the advantage of personal contact with him, are apt when we think of him to do scant justice to his extraordinary gifts, his large knowledge, his power as a controversialist, his varied product as an author, the wide circulation of his publications, the great immediate influence they all exerted and the permanent benefit many of them have conferred on the Church

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and society. I think it due to him that some one in this town, in which he spent so large a part of his life, and connected with this Seminary, of which, as Archibald Alexander said, "Samuel Miller and Ashbel Green were its chief founders," should so tell the story of his life as to revive the impression which Dr. Miller made on his contemporaries.

This is the more important, because it was precisely the fine symmetry or proportion of his faculties which was especially noted by those best qualified to judge him. This fact is nowhere better presented than in the commemorative discourse of Dr. William B. Sprague. Dr. Sprague knew Dr. Miller as long ago as when the latter was one of the pastors of the Church in New York, and was one of his students in the Seminary and an intimate friend and frequent correspondent throughout his teacher's life. And than Dr. Sprague, whose intimate knowledge of the lives of American ministers from Colonial days onward was unexcelled if not unequalled, no one was more competent to express an opinion on a minister's intellectual character. "Dr. Miller's mind," writes Dr. Sprague, "was distinguished rather for that harmonious blending of all the faculties, which generally secures the highest amount of usefulness, than for the striking predominance of some one quality, which often attracts more notice and admiration. You could not say that he was deficient in any faculty; you could not say that he exceeded others in any; but you could say that he exceeded most others in the symmetry and completeness of the intellectual man. His perceptions, if not remarkably quick, were remarkably clear; he hated intellectual and moral darkness, and knew how to distinguish between profound investigation and the wild sallies of an ambitious and dreamy philosophy. He had a ready and retentive memory, in which were carefully treasured the results of his study and observation. He had a sound discriminating judgment which never leaped in the dark and usually reached its conclusions by a legitimate process. If his imagination was not strikingly prolific, his taste was uncommonly exact; and every effort of the former was subject to the rigid control of the latter. He possessed in a high degree that admirable quality, common sense; which is so eminently a discerner of times and seasons, and which, even in the absence of what are usually considered the higher intellectual endowments, may be a security for an honorable and useful life. He had an unusually safe mind; a mind that moved luminously, effectively, yet cautiously; a mind that you would trust amidst agitating and convulsive scenes, and not be afraid to

read the report of its opinions and decisions. I remember," continues Dr. Sprague, "to have heard that the celebrated Joseph Priestly was much struck with the character of his mind while Dr. Miller was yet a very young man; and, little as he sympathized in his views of Christian doctrine, predicted that, if his life were spared, he would attain to great eminence in his profession." "Of his ability, learning and fidelity," said Archibald Alexander at his colleague's funeral, "there are hundreds of witnesses scattered over the land. No member of our Church has done more to explain and defend her doctrines than our deceased brother."

It is a great pleasure to me that the duty of delivering the opening address of the session affords me the opportunity to unfold, as well as I may in so short a time, the life of the second Professor of the Seminary, with a view especially to bringing before you his intellectual character and work. Unfortunately, his life was so full and our time is so short, that I must necessarily do him injustice.

His first ancestor in this country bearing his family name was John Miller, his grandfather, who was born in Scotland. John Miller migrated to America in 1710, and made his home in Boston. He was a young man of good education, having a good knowledge of Latin. He was bred to the business of sugar refining. He established in Boston and carried on with success a sugar refinery and distillery. He became a member of the Old South Church. His wife, Dr. Miller's grandmother, was Mary Bass. Through his grandmother, Dr. Miller was related to the Rev. Edward Bass, the first Protestant Episcopal Bishop of Massachusetts, who died only three or four years before Dr. Miller began his defense of the validity of Presbyterian ordination against the exclusive claims of the Episcopalians of New York. Through his great-grandmother, Ruth Alden, Dr. Miller was descended from John Alden and Priscilla Mullins of the *Mayflower* and the Plymouth Colony, the hero and heroine of Longfellow's poem, *The Courtship of Miles Standish*. Dr. Miller's father, also John Miller, was born in Boston in 1722, and studied for the ministry. Licensed in 1748 by the Association to which his pastor, the Rev. Dr. Sewall of the Old South Church, belonged, Mr. Miller was called to Delaware, to the pastorate of the Presbyterian Churches of Dover and Duck Creek Cross Roads. He was ordained in Boston in 1749, and soon after moved to his new home. Here he lived until his death in 1791; a studious and devoted minister of the Gospel; a patriot also, devoted to the cause of the Colonies during the War for Independence. His life was one of great hardship. He lived on a farm the products of which were designed to

supplement his meagre stipend. The climate he found debilitating. Probably the lack of underdrainage, common in new countries, was more responsible than the climate for the languor and frequent illnesses with which he suffered. But the state of his health did not prevent him from doing his full work as the pastor of two churches widely separated, and doing it well. His Scottish and English blood united with his Puritanism to make him an uncommonly strong character. He stood firmly for his convictions in State and Church. He defended the rebellious Colonies; and without hesitation gave his blessing to his eldest son and namesake, a young physician as, early in the war, he joined the army as a surgeon. The son went through the anxious and severe campaign which included the battles of Princeton and Trenton, and died of exhaustion before its conclusion, after having earned and received from the department surgeon, the highest eulogy as a physician, a patriot and a man. The death of his son only deepened and made sacred the father's devotion to the cause to which the son gave his life. In the Church he fought strenuously for a large infusion of Congregationalism in the Presbyterian Church. After the adoption of the Form of Government and the organization of the General Assembly, he would not attend any judicatory higher than the Presbytery. In 1751, John Miller married Margaret Millington, the daughter of an English sea captain who had become a planter in Maryland. She was born an Episcopalian but, soon after her marriage, became a member of her husband's Church. She was a woman of great beauty, of ardent piety and of large benevolence; of whom her distinguished son writes long afterward: "I never think of her character without veneration, wonder and gratitude."

They had a family of nine children, of whom two died in childhood. Of those who lived to maturity, five were sons. Dr. Samuel Miller's son and biographer is able to make this remarkable statement concerning his grandfather: "With many temptations in his secluded residence and straitened circumstances to slight the literary culture of his children or content himself with a business training for his sons, he nevertheless made out to give every one of them that lived beyond childhood an education counted liberal in those times. The five sons he himself, assisted with the younger by the older, instructed with great care in the Latin and the Greek languages, and sent them afterward, four to the University of Pennsylvania where they were regularly graduated Bachelors of Arts, and one to a Seminary of almost collegiate reputation."

Of these parents, on the thirty-first day of October, 1769, two

years and a half before the birth of Archibald Alexander, Samuel Miller was born. During his early boyhood the great events of the Revolutionary War occurred. When eighteen years old, he was in Philadelphia during the sessions of the Constitutional Convention. "He often spoke of standing within the great hall of entrance of the State House, to observe the members of the Convention as they went to and from the chamber where they sat with closed doors." He also attended, as a deeply interested spectator, the first General Assembly of the Church of which he was to become so eminent a minister. He saw John Witherspoon call it to order, and John Rodgers, who was the intimate friend of his father and afterward his own colleague in the New York Church, and whose biography he wrote, preside over its deliberations as Moderator.

The school in which Samuel Miller passed through the most of the curriculum leading to the bachelor's degree was held in his father's house. His teachers were his father and his older brothers. They carried him successfully through the studies of the first three years of the college course; so that in 1788, when he was between eighteen and nineteen years of age, he was admitted to the Senior class of the University of Pennsylvania. So well had he been prepared and so gifted and studious did he show himself, that he was graduated in 1789 with the "first honor" of his class; and he delivered on commencement day the Latin Salutatory. The Provost of the University was the Rev. John Ewing, who was also the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia. Dr. Ewing was one of the notable men of his day; a fine classical scholar, a man of scientific tastes and studies, a great administrator and the leader in Philadelphia of the Presbyterian Church. Dr. Ewing strongly influenced young Miller; and no more appreciative paper on his preceptor has been written than that contributed long afterward by Dr. Miller to Sprague's *Annals of the American Pulpit*.

Mr. Miller had already confirmed the vows of his baptism and become a communicant of his father's Church. During his College life the question of his son's future profession was a source of continual thought, it would hardly be right to say anxiety, to the father. The son did not determine the question for himself until he had been graduated and had returned to his home. It is characteristic of him that he approached it with deliberation and in a profoundly religious spirit. He set apart a day for its special consideration. He made it a day of fasting and prayer. "Before the day was closed," he writes in his diary, "after much deliberation and, I

hope, some humble looking for divine guidance, I felt so strongly inclined to devote myself to the work of the ministry, that I resolved in the Lord's name on the choice." The paper from which I have quoted is calm and serious. It does not breathe the spirit of the mystic. It is clearly the declaration of a man of judicial mind, who has reached a conclusion after the most conscientious study of his duty. What was true of most of the conclusions reached by Dr. Miller in later life was true of this one: he had no reason to reconsider or regret it. With the straightforwardness and sanity which always characterized him, he began at once to read divinity with his father. A few days later he wrote to his friend, Dr. Ashbel Green, then pastor of the Second Church in Philadelphia, requesting advice as to authors in theology, and announcing his intention of attending, after a year's study at home, the theological lectures of Dr. Nesbit, then President of Dickinson College.

In the midst of these studies his life was clouded by the death first of his mother and then of his father. It was an awful experience. He was sustained throughout it by his unfaltering faith, and emerged from it chastened in spirit, strengthened in character and fitted, as by nothing else he could have been, for the beginning of his great career as preacher and pastor. In the autumn of 1791, just after his father's death, he was licensed by the Presbytery of Lewes, and the succeeding winter he spent in Carlisle, to enjoy and be profited by the personal instruction of Dr. Nesbit. He lived as a member of Dr. Nesbit's family; and though he had not the benefit of hearing the celebrated course of theological lectures, he had, what was no doubt better, the privilege of daily intimate conversation with him. Dr. Miller has left on record his high estimate of Dr. Nesbit, and also his deep impression "of the immense advantage to be derived from coming into contact daily in the domestic circle with an acute, active and richly furnished mind." My belief is, that to this easy and habitual companionship with his teacher is largely due the ease with which Mr. Miller soon after threw himself into the learned society of New York, the ease also at which he put every one of his students, and the happiness they always found in conference with him in his own study.

In the spring of 1792 he went to New York to visit a Long Island Church "to which he had been invited as a candidate." In New York City he called on Dr. Rodgers, the friend of his father and the senior pastor of the Collegiate Presbyterian Churches of the city. At Dr. Rodgers' suggestion he remained for two weeks in New York, and preached several times in Dr. Rodgers' pulpit. He

then sailed up Long Island Sound to Newport, and from Newport he rode to Boston. He extended his travels in New England to Portsmouth, and returned through Connecticut. During his absence the United Congregations of the Churches of New York extended him a call to become one of the collegiate pastors. Before he had determined either to accept or decline it, his father's Church, of which he was born a member, earnestly urged him to become his father's successor. The simultaneous calls to these two fields of labor were striking testimonies to his ability, charm and character.

At the meeting of Presbytery both invitations were put into his hands and he accepted the call to New York. He began his twenty years pastorate in that city in January, 1793. New York in 1793 was, in population, the second city in the United States. Philadelphia was the metropolis; but New York, with forty-one thousand people, was rapidly pushing forward to the first place. It had, as it has at present, a less homogeneous population than either of its rivals, Boston or Philadelphia. And though more than a score of years were to elapse before the completion of the great canal which unites the lakes and the ocean at its harbor, its foreign trade was growing rapidly at the expense of that of Newport, of Boston and of Philadelphia. Presbytery was the earliest form of Church order organized on Manhattan island. But it was the Presbyterianism of the continent of Europe, and its Dutch Reformed Churches were held by ecclesiastical ties to the mother country during the very period when the Presbyterian Churches, having a British origin, were uniting to form a distinctively American Presbyterian Church. Besides the Collegiate Dutch Churches, the German Presbyterians had a Church and pastor, and so had the Scottish Seceders. The Presbyterians connected with the Synod, afterward the General Assembly of the United States of America, had begun to unite for worship in New York early in the eighteenth century. They suffered no little persecution from the English Governor, Lord Cornbury; but were finally organized as a Church in 1716. In 1719, the first house of worship was built; to this was added the Brick Church; and, three years after the settlement of Dr. Miller, the Rutgers Street Church was built to meet the needs of the growing population. The pastorate was collegiate; and each minister was the minister of the three congregations.

The senior pastor was the Rev. John Rodgers; one of the noblest figures among the ministers of the Revolutionary period; a man of strong character and deep piety. He was the sole pastor of the

Miller

THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE OF SAMUEL MILLER

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Had Mr. Miller been content with the popularity he so soon achieved, we may be sure that his career in New York would have been a brief one, and that we should not be meeting to-day to commemorate him. He brought, however, to the duties of his position a high ideal of the pastor's life. His native social gifts had been cultivated in his own growing family connections and in the admirable circle of society to which he was admitted while living in Philadelphia, at the house of his sister, as a student in the University. His good-will toward all he met, his affability and real courtesy, his ease and grace of manner and his love of social life made him at once what we are apt to call a social success. He learned to meet and converse with others without constraint; and his distinctively pastoral duties became a great pleasure to himself and his parishioners. His calls on the members of his congregation were not mere social visits. Few young ministers had undergone heavier affliction than he had; and no man ever esteemed more highly the personal ministrations of the consolations of Christianity than he esteemed them at this time, coming to his parish as he did from the newly made graves of his parents. In that series of letters called *Clerical Manners*, which embodies the highest wisdom and which might well be made the enchiridion of every pastor, Dr. Miller is only writing out of his own fidelity when he says: "If you desire to gain the love and confidence of your people; if you wish to instruct and edify them in a great variety of ways which the nature of pulpit address does not admit; if you deem it important to be well acquainted with their situation, views, feelings, difficulties and wants, then visit every family belonging to your congregation frequently, systematically and faithfully"; and when he gives this counsel concerning the self-inspection of the pastor; "Never retire from any company without asking yourself; 'What have I said for the honor of my Master, and for promoting the everlasting welfare of those with whom I conversed? What was the tenor of my conversation? What opportunity of recommending religion have I neglected to improve? From what motives did I speak or keep silence? In what manner did I converse? With gentleness, modesty, humility, and yet with affectionate fidelity; or with harshness, with formality, with ostentation, with vanity, and from a desire to avoid censure or to court popular applause?'" It was in the spirit of a lover of the cure of souls and with the ease and refinement of a cultivated gentleman, that young Samuel Miller went from house to house in his frequent, systematic and faithful visits. We can easily understand the solace that his senior colleague, the saintly

and venerated Dr. John Rodgers, himself one of the finest examples of the Christian pastor, must have found in his old age in the pastoral labors of the son of his old friend, whom he exerted his influence to secure as his co-laborer and successor.

Mr. Miller's fidelity as a pastor was put to the severest test. New York, then a city of fifty thousand people, was visited by the yellow fever. Half of the population left the city. In three months one-tenth of those who remained were dead. In the two collegiate Churches of which Dr. Miller was pastor, nearly two hundred fell victims to the pestilence. Throughout the visitation Dr. Miller remained in the city. His elder brother Edward was practicing medicine in New York and had become eminent in his profession. Charles Brockden Brown, the novelist, writes of Dr. Edward Miller and with special reference to this epidemic: "His skill exceeds that of any other physician." The two brothers were indefatigable in their labors for the sick; and though, as Samuel says, "they were both mercifully borne through the raging epidemic without any serious attack," they were exhausted when the fever had spent its force. The increased visits and the almost daily funerals might well have excused the young pastor had he omitted some of his public services. But "though only a few attended public worship," he preached every Lord's Day; and in his journal he moralizes, in the spirit of Thucydides when writing on the plague in Athens, over the diminished sensibility of the population and of himself, wrought by familiarity with "scenes of mourning and of horror."

The marked ability which he had shown in the pulpit and his fidelity to the duties of a pastor led the First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, just when the pestilence had abated or been overcome, to invite him to its pulpit as the colleague of the Rev. Dr. Ewing. This is a remarkable tribute to his character and gifts. Before he had reached thirty years of age he had thus been called to the most important pulpits of the two largest cities of the land.

It was while pressed with the cares and busied with the work of his pastorate that Dr. Miller first revealed the distinct character of his intellectual taste, and entered upon the historical studies and investigations in which he always delighted. His colleague, Dr. Archibald Alexander, from the time of his contact with his teacher, William Graham, exhibited a strong taste and aptitude for investigation in the sphere of abstract truth. Dr. Miller, so far as I have been able to learn, never discovered any deep interest in metaphysics, or in the kindred science of systematic theology. Whatever was the natural bent of his mind, he lived

intellectually in the sphere of the concrete. Of course he had theological convictions, and he could state and defend them, and they were in full accord with the faith of the Reformed Churches. But he was never a systematic theologian because he loved especially that study, as his colleague and so many New England divines loved it. His taste was historical. He was interested most in living men, in corporate institutions, in the Church of Christ, its organization, its ministry and discipline, and in the pastoral office, in the principles and rules of its right conduct. Hence his large literary product is mainly historical and biographical. The biographies or biographical sketches of Rodgers, Nesbit and the elder Edwards, the massive *Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*, are works he produced without a sense of drudgery, because they sprang out of his native gift and taste. And in all his polemic works, as his letters on Prelacy, his defense of Presbytery, and his work on the Ruling Elder, his chief and best stated arguments are historical. Indeed, I think we may say, not only that his taste for historical study was his intellectual distinction, but that of the professors of this Seminary he has given to the world the most important historical product. I do not forget that Dr. Addison Alexander sympathized with Dr. Miller's distaste (if in Dr. Miller's case so strong a word can be used) for abstract study. But Dr. Alexander's strong literary and linguistic determination gave a special direction to his love of concrete facts. Nor do I forget that among Dr. Charles Hodge's works not the least valuable is his *Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church*. But valuable as the *Constitutional History* is, we shall all agree that, in a good sense to be sure but in a real sense, it is a "tendency writing," the motive of which is to be found in systematic theology and not in history itself. Samuel Miller is by eminence our historian. And I think this a good point in my address at which to say that, considering the variety of his labors, the number and the character of his historical writings justify the statement that they exhibit historical talent of an exceptionally high order.

I say this now, because his love of historical work showed itself and his historical work began at just this time. As early as 1797, "he petitioned the Legislature of New York to allow him to search the records of the public offices of the State" under favorable conditions. This was with a view to his writing a History of the State of New York. None of Dr. Miller's ancestry settled in New York; but the native or acquired bent of his mind uniting with his residence in the metropolis impelled him to the work; and he organized a


method of search into the sources of New York's history which reveals that a high and severe ideal of study governed him. It was his interest in the actual movement of human life which led him to unite with other gentlemen of the city in organizing the New York Historical Society in 1804. He became its Corresponding Secretary. And the first historical paper published in its earliest volume is a discourse delivered by him commemorating the discovery of Manhattan Island by Hendrick Hudson.

The project of writing a History of the State of New York he was obliged to set aside for the time and, after he became professor at Princeton, finally to abandon. But while still in New York, and just at the beginning of the nineteenth century, he delivered to his congregation a sermon on the century just then closed. So impressed were those who listened to it with the writer's grasp of the subject and with its admirable generalizations, that they asked for its publication. The writer, on the contrary, was struck with its fragmentary character and its incompleteness in every sense. His dissatisfaction with it led him to plan and to write in three volumes the First Part (for he had in mind three more parts) of *The Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*. During the past summer I read it with great pleasure and profit, and I wish to speak of it for a few moments.

The copy I read is the London edition in three volumes. As I have said, it is only the first of the four parts which he planned to write. Had he completed the work as he had projected it, it would have required at least ten or twelve octavo volumes. The three parts which he did not write were intended to set forth the theology, the moral theories and the politics of the century. The first part is complete in itself. Its title-page is as follows. "*A brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*, Part the First; in three volumes; containing a sketch of the Revolutions and Improvements in Science, Arts and Literature, during that period. By Samuel Miller, A.M., London, 1805." The work is dedicated to his father's and his own friend, John Dickinson, eminent as a soldier and statesman in Pennsylvania and Delaware, and a patron of the college at Carlisle which was given his name. Each of its three octavo volumes contains over four hundred pages. The titles of the chapters will best show the large design that this young and burdened pastor dared to entertain and to execute. Chapter first is on Mechanical Philosophy, distributed into sections on Electricity, Galvanism, Magnetism, Motion and Moving Forces, Hydraulics, Pneumatics, Optics and Astronomy. The second is on Chemical Philoso-

phy; and the others follow on Medicine, Geography, Mathematics, Navigation, Agriculture, Mechanic Arts, The Fine Arts, Physiognomy, Classic Literature, Oriental Literature, Modern Languages, The Philosophy of Language, History, Biography, Romances and Novels, Poetry, Literary and Political Journals, Literary and Scientific Associations, Encyclopedias and Scientific Dictionaries, Education, Nations lately become Literary, as Russia, Germany and the United States—the whole work ending with a recapitulation of the subject.

If the scope of the work was ambitious, nothing could have been more modest than the claims for himself made by the author in the Preface and the Introduction. He was at great pains to bring to the attention of the reader his own limitations, the necessarily superficial or, at least, general character of his narratives, and the fact that it must be thought of as a compilation. Nor do these disclaimers impress one as mere ceremony, but as the modesty of a man who really knew his subject. When one turns from the prefatory chapters to the book itself, he soon discerns that if it is a compilation, it is so in the sense in which every historical work, particularly every historical work embracing a great variety of subjects, must be a compilation. It is clear that before he wrote, his acquisitions passed through the alembic of a strong intelligence, for they reappear upon the pages of his book as distinctively his own. His sympathetic appreciation of intellectual achievements as wide apart as many of those recorded by Mr. Miller justifies one in saying of him that his mind must have been exceptionally catholic and hospitable; and that he was finely endowed with powers of acquisition. The "safe judgment," of which Dr. Sprague speaks so strongly in his commemorative discourse, shows itself in nearly every discussion. The author in the Preface, while calling attention to the fact that the work is a compilation, adds: "Yet the writer claims to be something more than a mere compiler. He has offered where he thought proper opinions, reflections and reasonings of his own; and though many of these are adopted perhaps too hastily from others, there are some of which all the praise and all the blame belong to himself." It is characteristic of the man, that if his judgments of men and of their attainments err, they err on the side of charity. Indeed, anticipating the criticisms of some religious readers, he feels bound at the beginning to remind them that "a man who is a bad Christian may be a very excellent mathematician, astronomer or chemist; and one who denies or blasphemes the Saviour may write profoundly and instructively on some branches of science highly interesting to mankind."



I think Dr. Miller's style is at its best in the *Retrospect*; and when at its best his style is admirable for the purposes of the historian. In his Preface and Introduction there is, to be sure, not a little of the conventionality, perhaps we may say artificiality, of the period: but as he proceeds this passes away, and the style becomes lucid and natural, without losing any of its grace or dignity. Of course, he was aided by correspondents. His one real co-laborer was his brother, Dr. Edward Miller, to whose learning and ability at a later date, when his brother passed away, he paid a high and loving tribute.

No one can examine the work even cursorily without justifying the high position to which it raised the author in the esteem of his contemporaries. It was widely read in America and was, as I have said, soon republished in London. The impression it made of the author's talents and knowledge called out friendly protests against the modesty of the Preface and Introduction. Union College and University of Pennsylvania hastened to confer upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity, and he was at once elected a corresponding member of more than one foreign learned society.

I have selected the *Retrospect* for detailed notice because, unless we except the letters on clerical manners, it is the most genial of his literary works. It was written at that happy period of life when, though the ardor of youth has not abated, the judgment has been matured by experience; when acquirement is still easy, but when a sense of perspective has been attained by which acquisitions can be valued, and a large enough body of knowledge has been secured to enable the writer to correlate its elements. I am sure, that if you read the *Retrospect*, you will agree with me that nothing can be further removed than it is from the hasty and ill-considered work of the mere literary hack; and that if Dr. Miller had written nothing else, this of itself would have justified the honorable place he held among American authors of the period and his reputation as a man of large knowledge, strong intelligence, varied intellectual sympathies, and as, if not a great writer, at least, a writer of clear, strong and graceful English prose.

But this was not the only work he wrote at this period. Completed, as it was, under the hard conditions of feeble health and a laborious pastorate, it was scarcely finished when he was called to defend the ministry of his Church against an able and violent attack on its legitimacy. I suppose that until the whole Christian world is united in accepting either monarchy or democracy in the

Civil Government, the debate between Episcopacy and Presbytery in the Church will continue. Such a debate took place in New York at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as the result immediately of the publication by the Rev. John Henry Hobart, then rector of Trinity Episcopal Church, New York, and afterward Bishop of that Diocese, of a volume entitled *A Companion for the Altar*, to which he soon added *A Companion for the Festivals and the Fasts*. In these works Mr. Hobart took the position, logically involved in the Episcopalian premises, which is now so well known. But it was not so well known at that time in New York; for the exigencies of a new community had, just after the Revolution, effected, between the Episcopalians and Presbyterians of New York City, a *modus vivendi*, which involved courtesies not hospitable to controversy. Mr. Hobart, a man of marked ability and of convictions, felt that the time had come to assert the characteristic claims of his communion; and he did so with a frankness which left nothing to be desired. It seemed to Dr. Miller, as it did to his contemporary, Dr. John M. Mason, that both truth and self-respect demanded the vindication of Presbyterian ordination; and the vindication was carried forward with such spirit and learning and address by these two ministers as gave our Episcopalian friends plenty of work for several years. Dr. Miller's part in the vindication was published in a series of *Letters on the Christian Ministry*, in which what one of his reviewers calls, "his happy talent for the composition of a book," is conspicuous. Of course, the debate was even then an old one. So thoroughly had the materials been wrought over in the controversies through five reigns of British sovereigns that it would have been remarkable had any real addition to the argument been made by the combatants on either side. But if Dr. Miller did not add materially to the argument, he showed adequate scholarship, marshaled the proofs for Presbyterianism with great ability and popular effect, and kept his temper better than any of his opponents. What the Episcopalians wrote to cheer their champions after the conflict I do not know; but Dr. Miller, I am sure, must have felt himself compensated for his labors by the letters he received from two jurists like Brokholst Livingston, then a Justice of the United States Supreme Court, and James Kent, the Chancellor and author of the Commentaries, and from Noah Webster, the lexicographer. I wish that time permitted me to quote their earnest language of satisfaction and of praise.

Necessary as the composition and publication of his vindication

of his ministry seemed to him to be on grounds of self-respect and in the interest of the truth, polemical writing, I take it, he did not find a pleasure. Far more congenial was the third work written by him during his New York pastorate: I mean his biography of the Rev. Dr. John Rodgers. It is a piece of admirable biographical work. But it is more. Dr. Miller felt that he could not do justice to Dr. Rodgers without bringing forward the large relations he sustained to the State, and in particular to his communion. In this way it became not only an interesting biography, but a most valuable contribution to history; so that one, writing of it thirty years after its publication, justly spoke of it as a "richly replenished storehouse, in which Dr. Miller has introduced, naturally and appropriately, nearly everything that was known thirty years ago of the history of our Church." Besides these three considerable works, making five volumes, there were published during his pastorate in New York not less than twenty-five discourses and essays.

I have already spoken of the recognition of his talents and services by Union College and the University of Pennsylvania. But there were still more grateful recognitions. He was elected Moderator of the General Assembly. He was made a Trustee of Princeton College. When Andover Seminary was about to be established, he was urged to permit his election to one of its chairs. Dickinson College, Hamilton College, and the University of North Carolina each called him to its presidency. Dr. Ashbel Green, writing of his own election to the presidency of Princeton College, says: "Dr. Miller, without my knowledge or suspicion, had gone to every member of the Board and persuaded them to give me a unanimous vote, and to throw the responsibility of rejecting it on myself. Dr. Miller himself," he adds, "was the man that I had determined to nominate as the President of the College." I think we may safely say, that no other minister of our Church, at the time of which I am speaking, was so widely and favorably known as Dr. Miller, none was more admired as a man of great and varied gifts and learning, and none was more highly respected as a man of lofty character and of wisdom in counsel.

Like his friends, Ashbel Green and Archibald Alexander, he was fruitful in projects for extending the Church's influence and usefulness, and fertile in resource when trying to give his plans effect. I cannot even name them. Of one of them, however, it would be a grave omission not to speak in this place. Dr. Archibald Alexander, speaking at Dr. Miller's funeral, and setting aside his own important services, said: "No man in the Church was more zealous

and active in founding this institution. He and Dr. Green may more properly be considered its founders than any other persons." It would be invidious to institute any comparison in amount and value between the labors of Dr. Green and those of Dr. Miller in the establishment of this Seminary. No such comparison was made while they were living, and we are not in a condition to decide between them now. Certainly, Dr. Green took the first public action, which was the overture sent by him to the Assembly of 1805. But this overture appears itself to have been in large part the result of a letter written to him by Dr. Miller in which he said, as he had in substance said before: "I cannot help again mentioning my anxiety about the scarcity of ministers in our connection. I cannot help thinking that measures more speedy and vigorous ought to be contemplated. If anything can be done, I know of no individual either likely or able to do a tenth part so much as yourself in this very interesting matter." The overture followed the letter; and the two worked together in the most absolute harmony, until the Seminary was established and the services of Dr. Archibald Alexander were secured for its professorship.

Dr. Miller's large and complex work as a pastor in New York, as a patriotic public-spirited citizen, as a diligent student of his Church's and his country's history, and as one of the most influential and active ministers of his communion, was greatly aided, and many of his burdens transmuted into pleasures, by his enviable temperament, his deep Christian interest in individuals, and his fine gift for friendship and for social life. "He was a gentleman of the old school," writes Dr. James W. Alexander, "though as easy as he was noble in bearing; full of conversation, brilliant in company, rich in anecdote and universally admired." Probably, no minister of his day had a larger circle of correspondence or enjoyed his correspondence more. Among these, I am quite sure, were nearly all, if not all, of the more prominent ministers of the Presbyterian Church, and a large number of eminent ministers in New England. I have read the names of at least twenty-five of his foreign correspondents. And among those in America who were not ministers, it is interesting to find the names of John Adams, the second President, to whom he was related through his Bass ancestors, John Jay, the great Chief Justice, and James Kent, the Chancellor and great law writer. Among his ministerial friends living at a distance, he was perhaps most intimate with Ashbel Green, Edward Dorr Griffin and Eliphalet Nott, a group of notable men. His abundant hospitality was made more delightful than ever in 1804. For in that year he mar-

ried, in Philadelphia, Sarah Sergeant, the daughter of the Hon. Jonathan Dickinson Sergeant, an eminent lawyer of the Philadelphia Bar and the Attorney-General of the Commonwealth; a descendant of both President Jonathan Dickinson of the College of New Jersey and the Rev. Elihu Spencer of Trenton. Sarah Sergeant's brothers, John and Thomas, deservedly attained great eminence in public life; and she had as strong and active a mind as either of her brothers. Her social life in Philadelphia before her marriage, the exceptional charm of her person and manners and character, and her deep interest in religion united in preparing her for the social life to which her marriage introduced her. It would be pleasant to dwell longer on Dr. Miller's pastorate in New York. I can only say, that before it closed, the collegiate relation between the Pastors and the three Churches was dissolved. Dr. Miller became the Pastor of what is now known as the First Church; and before his pastorate closed led his Church in the work of building a new house of worship in Wall street.

Dr. Miller's life in New York was ended by his acceptance in 1813 of the call of the General Assembly to the professorship of Church History and Church Government in this institution. He left behind him in New York a vigorous and united congregation and one deeply attached to him. While they did not think proper to make any opposition to it, "they deeply lamented the proposed separation of their pastor." Dr. Miller, though he accepted the call, felt deeply, as any one called from the pastorate to a chair like that of Church History must feel, his want of special study; and he expressed this feeling in his diary. But the Church at large had no such feeling. He had shown, as no other man in the Church had shown, a deep interest in historical subjects, and the ability to produce valuable historical literature. Even before he was called to the chair he had been elected the official historian of the Church. His conviction of the Scriptural character of the Church's government and discipline and the Apostolic character of its ordination, he had defended with special scholarship and with marked ability in a great public controversy. And, so far as those subjects might be taught by him, his distinguished career as a preacher and pastor were the best guarantee of his ability to instruct the students in homiletics and pastoral theology. The whole Church was confident that the wisest choice possible had been made; and Dr. Alexander welcomed his friend of many years most cordially as his colleague.

The two men admirably supplemented each other in their gifts and

learning. The intellects of both of them were richly endowed by nature, and both were exceptionally industrious in their cultivation, and eager to seize every opportunity to increase their knowledge. It has not seldom been said that in native gifts they present a striking contrast. I am not at all sure that they do. Why Samuel Miller should not have become deeply interested in metaphysical and ethical studies, had he been taught by William Graham; or why Archibald Alexander should not have become enthusiastic in the investigation of the facts of human history had he been educated by John Ewing and at once been called to a city like New York or Philadelphia, I do not know. And why may we not say, that the spontaneous speech of the one and the other's elaboration of his theme in sermonizing are due, quite as much to the conditions under which they severally began their professional careers, as to any difference in native gifts? For, from all I can learn of Samuel Miller, I am confident that when the conventionality of the pulpit and the platform did not govern him, when he was one of a social company, he easily drew on his uncommonly rich resources; and, with a spontaneity like that of Dr. Alexander in the pulpit or on the platform, poured forth a stream of elevated and eloquent speech on any one of a great variety of high subjects, in the most captivating way, illustrating it with story and humanizing it with gentle humor, so as exactly to answer to James Alexander's description, "full of conversation, brilliant in company, rich in anecdote and universally admired." And, if only his perhaps too severe sense, I will not say of propriety, but of the conventional proprieties, had been relaxed, and he had carried the freedom he enjoyed in the company of his friends into the pulpit, as Dr. Alexander did, it is quite certain that—with his deep spirituality, his normal Christian experience, his fine sincerity and benignity, his power quickly to organize his knowledge in oratorical form, his large vocabulary, his wide range of knowledge, his rare wisdom, his human sympathies, his humor and his pathos—his preaching would have been marked by just the qualities which would have given him the reputation of a brilliant and thrilling preacher, instead of one—to quote Dr. James Alexander's words—"always instructive, calm and accurate, clear without brilliancy, accustomed to laborious and critical preparation, and relying little on the excitement of the occasion."

So far as I can see, neither of these remarkable men had the advantage of the other in point of what we call spontaneity; which is only the absolute possession of one's intellectual resources, the

immediate organization of them under oratorical categories, and the quick incarnation of them in forceful speech. The only difference between them in this respect that I can detect is, that Samuel Miller, who was eminently a man of the city and of the eighteenth century, enjoyed his spontaneity and attained his highest eloquence in the *salon*; and Dr. Alexander, living in a free community, like Attica, and at a time when it was pulsating under the domination of great ideas of civil freedom and religion, was spontaneous on the platform and in the pulpit, before public assemblies of his people. I am glad to give expression to this view of their underlying likeness. The contrast between them has been too often and too strongly emphasized.

Yet it is true, as I have already said, that there was between them just that difference in either natural or acquired temperament and taste which made them finely supplement one another. Thus the usefulness of each was increased. A deep and beautiful friendship resulted from their close association. Perhaps the absence of anything like jealousy, which Dr. Hodge remarks, ought not to be surprising, when we think of the largeness of the men and the depth of their religious characters. But it is a benediction to us to read these words, written by the son of one of them: "As years rolled on and old age arrived their concord and affection presented a beautiful and edifying spectacle. They conversed together and prayed together."

Dr. Miller was soon immersed not only in the public duties of his new position, but in the preparation of his lectures. He early completed courses in both departments committed to his care. He won at once the confidence of his students, and became very soon an admirable teacher. His study was open to them all; and his long experience as a pastor and his large knowledge of the Church made him a valued and most valuable adviser. But his activity could not be confined to the Seminary, just as in New York it could not be confined to his congregation. Indeed, what may be called his public life became even more strenuous. He preached almost as often as when he was a pastor. The calls upon him for special services brought him before widely separated congregations. He was one of the most active and influential Trustees of Princeton College. He worked hard to increase the endowments and especially the scholarship funds of the Seminary. He did his full share in contributing articles to the *Princeton Review*. When the theological and ecclesiastical agitation which culminated in the division of the Church began, he was deeply interested in

measures that he hoped would secure peace, and was active in inventing them. But as the agitation increased and it became impossible not to take sides, he with his colleagues ranged themselves on the Old School side; and rejoiced in the decision which affirmed the validity of the Exscinding Act. He was even more prolific as an author than he had been during his New York life, and he projected far more works than he was able to complete. But all he completed he published, and all he published were read by a large public. He defended the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity, in a series of letters, occasioned by the criticisms of his sermon at the installation of the Rev. William Nevins, of Baltimore. In Practical Theology he wrote the valuable manual, of which I have already spoken, called *Letters on Clerical Manners and Habits*, besides an admirable treatise on *Public Prayer*. His works in the department of Church Government, like his letters on *The Christian Ministry*, *Ruling Elders*, and the *Primitive and Apostolic Order*, were to be found on the book shelves of almost every minister of the Church. In biography he wrote an extended sketch of Jonathan Edwards, and a memoir of his theological preceptor, Dr. Nisbet. But I cannot stop even to name his published volumes. If his bibliography were written, I am sure that, counting his published discourses and his contributions to periodicals like the *Biblical Repertory*, it would consist of nearly, if not quite, two hundred titles.

A catalogue of his activities after he came to Princeton would reveal the fact that he responded sympathetically to the appeal of every good cause associated with religion, education and social improvement, and that his sympathy at once passed over into active effort. The President of the College and the senior Professor of the Seminary both knew him intimately; and each has put on record his tribute to the largeness and cheerfulness of his private charities. And so active was he as a Churchman that Dr. Carnahan said that "his biography in its public relations would be the history of the Presbyterian Church for fifty years."

The testimony of his pupils is abundant that he was an able teacher; interesting and informing in his lectures and successful in getting honest work out of his classes. No doubt, we have all heard the remark made that he was not so quickening and stimulating a teacher as was Dr. Alexander. It never made any impression on me except the impression that it was not a well-considered remark. Whenever I have heard it I have thought of their respective departments. Dr. Archibald Alexander taught Apologetics, and Polemic and Systematic Theology; and Dr. Miller taught Church

History and Church Government. Far be it from me, in this presence, to institute a comparison, in respect to the quality of interest, between the several departments of this Seminary. But I was once a Professor of Apologetics, and am now a Professor of Church History; and I may, not improperly, relate my own experience. In my former classroom it was impossible to find a student who did not bring to the recitation a more or less elaborated theory of the universe. And whether the subject before us was the argument for the being of God, or the nature of personality in man, or the freedom of the will, or the question whether mere probable proof can create obligation in the sphere of religion—only so the subject was an abstract one—it was my experience that even an indifferent teacher is not wholly unequal to the task of exciting interest and stimulating, momentarily at least, the minds of those before him. For, as Cicero long since pointed out, "Men without teaching have a certain anticipation of the Gods"; and the title of the third chapter of the first book of John Calvin's *Institutes of Religion* is those great words, "*Dei notitiam hominum mentibus naturaliter esse insitam.*" Hence the Apologist and the Theologian lecture to no absolutely unready minds. There, constitutionally impressed on every pupil, is the apprehension of fundamental truth, ready to be quickened, to be made distinct, to be corrected, and to be related to the human consciousness.

But when the subject taught is not abstract but concrete; when it is empirical facts; the stimulation of the pupil is by no means so easy a task. And whether the facts to be studied are the Hebrew etymology, or the syntax of New Testament Greek, or the names and dates included in the history of the Church during the Nicene period; the teacher cannot hope to find, as in the other case, to quote the phrase of Calvin, that "these have been impressed upon the mind by a certain natural instinct." And therefore, when I am told that Samuel Miller was not so stimulating a teacher as Archibald Alexander, I wonder whether the difference was not in the subjects rather than the men. Indeed, I once received important information on this general subject in the reply made to me by a young gentleman whom I had occasion rather sharply to correct in respect to some facts and dates which it seemed to me important that he should know. He said to me, with an accuracy and a sincerity that I wished his intelligence might equal: "I care nothing at all for the facts, but I am deeply interested in the philosophy of history."

I cannot carry you through the years of Dr. Miller's Seminary

professorship. It is not necessary to do so in order to revive the impression which he made on his contemporaries as a man of great intellectual power, attainment and accomplishment. Each of the first two Professors of this institution had a distinct individuality; its second Professor's was no less distinct than its first Professor's. Each did so large a work and each did it so well, that we who are their successors may well be humbled as we think of the ideal to which the career of each of them gave actuality. There was nothing like rivalry between them when they lived. If they were different in their gifts, their work, and the character of their respective impacts upon the minds of their students and the life of the Church, so much the better both for their students and for the Church. The result was, in the one case, a better theological education, and, in the other, a richer and more beneficent life. It has been my pleasure to have read almost all that each gave to the world, and to have studied in detail the careers of both. I cannot better reproduce the impression which this study has made on me than by saying, that they appear in our firmament as twin stars, moving around the Central Light of the Universe. The longer I contemplate them, the more nearly certain I become that they are stars of the same magnitude. Nor do they differ in their consummate glory. For their consummate glory is their unhasting and unresting movement in their common orbit around the Central Sun, their loving and adoring loyalty to their redeeming God.

Princeton.

JOHN DE WITT.

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